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A PLEA FOR SIMPLICITY OF SUBJECT

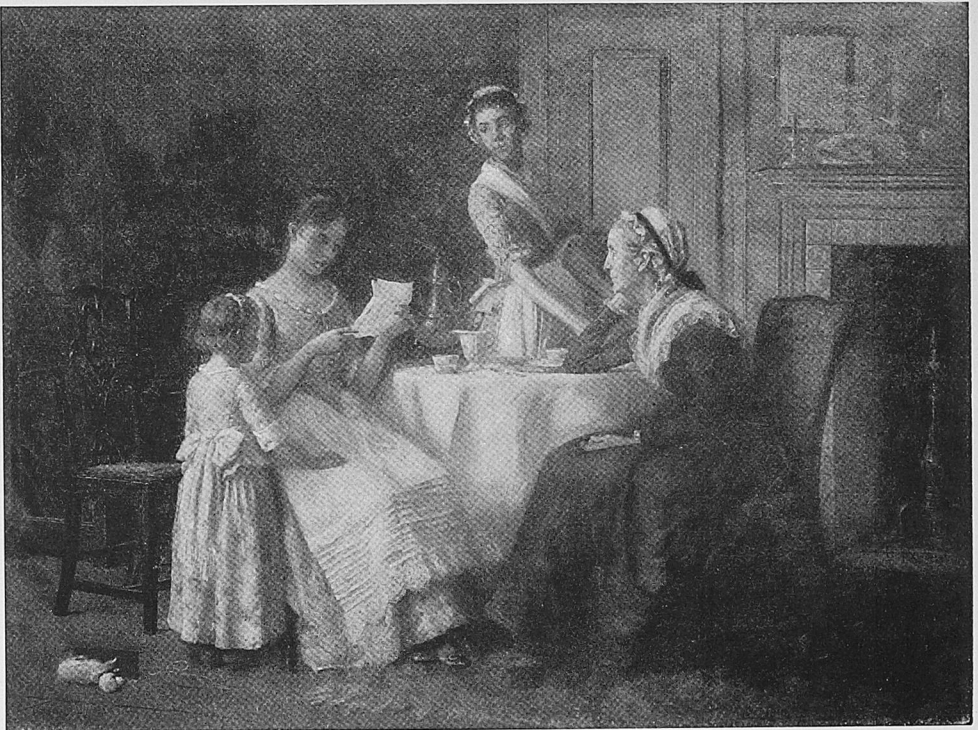
BY CLARENCE COOK.

With original illustrations by Percival De Luce.



HELPING HANDS.

PERCIVAL DE LUCE's lyre—for the artist uses lines and color where the poet uses words—is of small compass, but serves him well to express his thoughts. He does not deal in high ideals but keeps the common road, and records in his pictures the every-day incidents that, slight or even insignificant in themselves, are invested with a certain charm when touched by the hand of art. A little child bringing her small armful of gleanings in the wheat-field to swell the store of her mother and sisters; the anxious widowed mother, listening intently to news from her sailor son, read by his wife, his child at her side, and the servant pausing in her work to listen; the younger sister asking her elder sister's advice about her half-finished embroidery; the maiden of fourteen summers idling in her hammock under orchard boughs, divided in her innocent mind between her book and some absent playmate; a child looking at her ringlet-framed face in an old-fashioned dressing-glass; baby at her breakfast with pussy at her side discreetly waiting for a share of the por-



TIDINGS FROM THE SEA.



ASKING ADVICE.

ringer's contents—these and such as these—subjects of no importance in themselves—are made worth our notice by the direct, simple and honest treatment of the artist. The air of unconsciousness, the naturalness of gesture and attitude, without the appearance of effort, and absolutely without affectation—these qualities, of the highest importance in the treatment of such subjects, and far more difficult of attainment in them than in those of a heroic or romantic character, are conspicuous in Mr. De Luce's work, and are perhaps the chief source of his popularity.

There is a side on which the artistic indifference to the subject of a picture is



A CLOVER-LEAF.

justified. The true artist can make any subject interesting, or can invest with charm any commonest object in nature or art. How often, in our walks about even such a city as New York, seemingly as poor in artistic interest as a chess-board, do we happen upon incidents that rightly treated would



SELF-STUDY.

make pictures to be remembered, or at any rate such as would strikingly fix attention for a time. Far more interesting to an artist's eye than the costly houses that line the noble Riverside Drive, are the masts and spars of the freighting vessels and sloops

that lie at the wharf, seen at the enchanting hour when the night bids farewell to the eastern wending day. At such an hour, too, the great hulks of the grain - elevators atone for our lack of buildings that appeal to the imagination, as do the huge bulks of the European cathedrals overtopping their towns. Nor is it necessary, as some of our artists, impatient of facts,



"A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE."



ON HER GOOD BEHAVIOR.



SUMMER IDLENESS.

have done, to invest the daily realities of our city and its bay with the pyrotechnics of Turner, or the kaleidoscopic effects of Monet or Renoir. Their magic is their own; it does not need to borrow a charm from any other source. A painter like our Edward Simmons, choosing his hour—and Nature has everywhere her favorite hour—could do for our bay, or for either of our embracing rivers, what he has done for the Bay of Penzance or the water of St. Ives.

These perhaps are subjects that call for higher artistic powers than fall to the common lot; but though it seem like paradox, it is true that things of positively no interest in themselves can be made more than interesting, can become the source of positive pleasure: an earthen jug or dish in a picture by Teniers—see the flower in a glass bottle in that excellent picture ascribed to



A SPANISH SEÑORITA.

George Gyze, though they have the defect of distracting us from the young merchant's face; or, to come down to our own time, the pile of dinner-plates, delightful to see even in photograph, in Dagnan-Bouveret's "Nuptial Blessing." Looking, the other day, at a picture by Chase—one of those studio interiors he paints so well—I was struck with the pictorial value given to a mere picture-frame: an ordinary black moulding bordering a black and white drawing in a gray mat. Amid a multitude of avowedly pictorial objects this unconscious frame, secure in its



STUDY OF A HEAD.

him in the gallery of our Historical Society—the Incantation scene; or the crowd of objects on the table in Holbein's portrait of



AN IMPORTANT LETTER.



STUDY OF A HEAD.

absolute truthfulness, became the key-note of the composition.

It is not the illusion produced by this sort of painting—in truth there is but little ; it is not the mere skill shown in the painting ; such skill appeals to the artist's fellow-artists alone ; it is, rather, the power to perceive, and to make us perceive, the inner nature of things reckoned insensible ; as Emerson, deeply wise, says of Art, that she can

Give to barrows,
trays, and pans,
Grace and glim-
mer of romance.



THE FAN—A PORTRAIT STUDY.

The art of the best Dutch painters, has, besides the technical merits that belong to art, the charm that it deals with the life they saw about them in the cottage, the inn-yard, the citizen's house ; they painted what they knew and loved, and they were strong just so long as they kept to that faith and practice.

It has not yet been given to our art to match in color or in command of light and shade, the best work of the best Dutchmen.



DO YOU WANT SOME ?

It is nevertheless possible for us to match their sincerity, their simple loyalty to nature, and their content with the world in which their lot was cast. The other gifts may come with time. Every artist who deals directly with life, and finds his inspiration in things about him, has at least one sure claim on our regard, and if, on this foundation, he be able to build with beautiful art, his place is secure for all time.

In the pictures of the Dutch artists we are at first more struck with the simplicity of the problem they had to deal with, than with the beautiful ease of its solution. Even with the few clever men among us who emulate the Dutch perfection—and Mr. DeLuce well deserves a place in the catalogue—we are sometimes late in recognizing the talent that has made so much out of so little.